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DEPT FOR NEA/ARP AMACDONALD AND INR SMOFFATT

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [SCUL](#) [KISL](#) [YM](#)
SUBJECT: IN SEYOUN, FRUSTATION WITH SANA'A, FEAR OF THE
SALAFIS

Classified By: Ambassador Stephen Seche for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (S) SUMMARY. Political and social life in Wadi Hadramout has taken a turn for the worse in recent years, members of the political opposition and civil society told PolOff in an August 4 visit to Seyoun. Hadramis complained of Sana'a's centralization of power and discrimination against southerners, but remain committed to a unified Yemen. The greatest threat to near-term Yemeni stability in Hadramout is likely the rapidly growing conservative Salafi religious movement, which threatens local society and Western interests in the region and which poses challenges to the ROYG itself. END SUMMARY.

JMP: WE WANT UNITY, BUT NOT THIS UNITY

¶2. (C) In an August 4 meeting with the opposition Joint Meeting Parties (JMP) in Seyoun (Hadramout governorate), party leaders expressed frustration with the extreme centralization of power in Sana'a and over 15 years of discrimination against southerners. "A federal system is the only solution. With every election, Yemeni democracy has grown weaker, rather than stronger," Islah chief Mohammed Abu Baker Hassan told PolOff. Yemeni Women's Union (YWU) Chief Financial Officer Zahra Awadh blamed authorities in Sana'a for cutting the local chapter's budget by more than half in 2009, effectively crippling operations. The JMP also described discrimination against native Hadramis by northerners who moved to the area after unification in 1990. Islah member Rabei Ahmed Ba Suwaid told PolOff that "qualified southern judges were replaced by incompetent northern judges." Northern businessmen in central Hadramout shirk paying their taxes, and agricultural lands have been distributed unfairly, according to the JMP. (Note: Despite repeated attempts, ROYG and ruling General People's Congress (GPC) contacts in Seyoun were unable to meet with PolOff during her August 4 visit. End Note.)

¶3. (C) Despite their grievances, opposition leaders in Seyoun unanimously backed a unified Yemen. Still, as Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP) Deputy Chief Faraj Awadh Tahis said, "We have exhausted almost all of our patience with this government. Yes, we want unity, but not this unity." According to Islah's Hassan, the Southern Movement is a "natural expression of widespread frustration with the government." The party chiefs agreed that the movement was present in Wadi Hadramout) specifically the cities of Shibam, Seyoun and Tarim) but thus far anti-government protests have been more spontaneous and less organized. In 2009, however, the ROYG has increased the Central Security Forces (CSF) footprint in Hadramout, according to the JMP. (Comment: PolOff observed an unusually heightened security presence in Seyoun, including elements of the National Security Bureau (NSB), Political Security Organization (PSO), CSF and Directorate of Military Intelligence (DMI). It was

unclear whether the elevated security presence on August 4 was a result of the anticipated visit by American officials, counter-terrorism concerns or ROYG fears of a local Southern Movement presence. End Comment.)

THE YEMENI TALIBAN?

¶4. (C) The primary concern for members of civil society is the rapidly growing Salafi presence throughout Wadi Hadramout. Alawi bin Sumait, the Seyoun chief correspondent for independent Aden-based al-Ayyam newspaper, said central Hadramout was becoming increasingly extremist, comparing the new environment of religiosity and strict cultural mores to Taliban-ruled Afghanistan. Bin Sumait and Hadrami Cultural Forum Chairman Hussein Hassan al-Saqqaf, both lifelong residents of the Wadi, said the Salafis had begun to restrict local culture) banning music, seminars, books and films. Saqqaf said there were only two barbers left in Seyoun who would shave a man's beard, and said the Salafis called men without beards "kafirs" (nonbelievers).

¶5. (C) Bin Sumait and Saqqaf described the dominant presence of Salafi charitable organizations, including their vast financial resources (derived mainly from Saudis of Yemeni origin), and their extensive network of religious schools and direct support of thousands of Hadrami families during Ramadan and throughout the year. Due to new terrorist finance laws, the charities now conduct much of their business in cash payments, Saqqaf said. The three largest Salafi organizations in Seyoun, Shibam and Tarim are al-Hikma, al-Ihsan and al-Ibadi, bin Sumait told PolOff. Saqqaf and bin Sumait agreed that extremist elements among

the Salafis have specifically targeted Shibam for operational expansion, due to its appeal as a tourist destination, and said that more terrorist attacks similar to the suicide attack on the South Korean tourists in March would occur in the near future.

COMMENT

¶6. (S) In its outlook, the JMP's Seyoun branch more closely reflects counterparts in Sana'a than elsewhere in the southern governorates. While eschewing talk of secession, however, the opposition projected a bleak outlook on the political future of the region. From both a Yemeni as well as a Western perspective, the greater challenge to Yemeni stability emanating from Hadramout appears to be the rapid spread of the ultra-conservative Salafi movement and the extremist environment it engenders. END COMMENT.
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